

# 4 The Cal Grant Application Process

“ Receipt by the Commission of both the FAFSA record and the GPA constitutes a complete Cal Grant application. ”

## 4.1 Applying for a Cal Grant

A student applies for a Cal Grant by submitting both a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and a verified grade point average (GPA) on or before the statutory deadline. For most students, the deadline is March 2. The student mails, or electronically submits, the FAFSA to the U.S. Department of Education's (USED) central processor. The central processor sends FAFSA records for California students and students attending California schools to the Commission. The GPA is verified by the school and submitted by either the school or the student directly to the Commission. Receipt of both the FAFSA record and the GPA, by the Commission, constitutes a complete Cal Grant application.

Students with preliminary eligibility for a Cal Grant C award will receive a supplemental application that must also be completed in order for the student to be awarded a Cal Grant C. This process is discussed in Section 4.7.

For community college students applying for the September 2 deadline, the student's Social Security number must appear on a community college enrollment disk, in addition to submitting a FAFSA and a verified GPA. This process is discussed in Section 4.8.

## 4.2 Types of Grade Point Averages

The type of GPA submitted affects a student's eligibility for a Cal Grant Entitlement versus a Cal Grant Competitive award. It is important that schools understand the various types of GPAs and who can calculate them. The types of GPAs that can be submitted are outlined below.

### High School Grade Point Averages

Consideration for a Cal Grant Entitlement award requires the submission of a high school GPA. High schools submitting GPAs must meet **at least one** of the following requirements. The school must:

- be accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), **or**
- be accredited by another regional accrediting association if the secondary school is not located in the WASC region, **or**
- have a University of California “a-g” subject area approved course list.

A WASC-accredited, or other regionally accredited, secondary school may include grades from a non-accredited institution if the grades count toward the accredited school's graduation requirements. Only those grades earned during the terms specified in Section 4.3

Type of GPA	Awards
High School	Entitlement or Competitive
College	Competitive
California Community College	Transfer Entitlement or Competitive
Reestablished	Competitive B only
Test Score	Entitlement or Competitive

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can be included in the GPA. Transfer grades cannot be accepted if they cannot be converted to a 4.00 GPA scale.

A postsecondary institution can calculate a high school GPA based upon official high school transcripts in its possession. By submitting the high school GPA, the institution certifies that the high school GPA was calculated as prescribed in Section 4.3. The college is also certifying that the high school where the GPA was earned is either:

- ♦ WASC accredited
- ♦ accredited by another regional accrediting association if the secondary school is not in the WASC region, **or**
- ♦ has a University of California “a-g” approved course list.

Regardless of who submits the high school GPA verification, the GPA must be identified as a high school GPA for a student to be considered for a Cal Grant Entitlement award.



### More Information?

For more information on whether or not a specific high school is eligible to submit GPAs, the following sources may be helpful:

**WASC accredited?** Check the Accrediting Commission for Schools (ACS) Web site. ACS is a division of WASC and the Web site is at <http://www.acswasc.org/>. Information can be found under the “Members” link.

**Regional Accrediting Association?** The term “another regional accrediting association” refers to those accreditation agencies recognized as Regional Institutional Accrediting Agencies by the United States Department of Education. A list of those agencies can be found at [http://www.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred/accreditation\\_pg5.html#Regional%20Institutional](http://www.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred/accreditation_pg5.html#Regional%20Institutional)

**University of California “A - G” Policy?** More information on the University of California “a-g” subject area requirements can be found on the Web site of the University of California’s Office of the President at: <http://pathstat1.ucop.edu/ag/a-g/index.html>

### California Community College Grade Point Averages

California Community College GPAs can be submitted by any California Community College or any college in possession of official California Community College transcripts. A GPA must be identified as a California Community College GPA for a student to be considered for a Transfer Entitlement award.

### Reestablished Grade Point Averages

Reestablished GPAs can be submitted for students who wish to improve, or reestablish, their GPA by attending a California Community College. Only California Community Colleges may submit reestablished GPAs. Students for whom reestablished GPAs are submitted will only receive consideration for a Cal Grant B Competitive award.

### Test Scores

Test scores can be submitted in lieu of a GPA in certain circumstances. The acceptable tests are the General Educational Development Test (GED), the American College Test (ACT) and the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT I). The Commission does not accept the SAT II subject tests or the California High School Proficiency Exam (CHSPE).

### College Grade Point Averages

Any college may submit a GPA on behalf of a student for consideration for a Cal Grant Competitive award. A college GPA will not be considered for a Cal Grant Entitlement award.

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### 4.3 Calculating Grade Point Averages

For Cal Grant purposes, GPAs must be calculated based on the requirements in the California Code of Regulations (CCR) Title 5, Division 4, Article 1, §30007.

#### High School Grade Point Averages

A high school GPA must be calculated on a 4.00 scale computed to two decimal places. Grades for coursework based on any scale other than a 4.00 maximum scale must be converted to a 4.00 equivalent prior to inclusion in the calculated GPA. If a grade cannot be converted to a 4.00 equivalent, it cannot be included as part of the Cal Grant GPA. The high school GPA must include all coursework for the sophomore year, the summer following the sophomore year, the junior year, and the summer following the junior year.

For high school graduates who apply after their senior year, their high school GPA includes senior year coursework. A student who will complete high school after her/his junior year will have a GPA calculated on all sophomore (grade 10) and any junior (grade 11) work completed as of the time of GPA certification. Although the school may technically consider this student a senior level student, all grades from coursework completed as of the time of GPA certification should be included.

**Failed Coursework-** GPAs shall only include the most recent grade for any course repeated by a student. Failed coursework must be included if it has not been repeated at the time of GPA certification.

**Some Items Excluded-** The GPA must *not* include grades from physical education, Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) and remedial courses. Grades from the summer prior to the sophomore year are to be excluded from the GPA calculation for all students,

including those who have already advanced to sophomore (grade 10) status.

**Remedial?** The term “remedial” is not defined by statute. Therefore, high schools should apply the definitions used by their institution, applying these standards consistently for all GPAs calculated.

All GPA certifications, including high school GPAs submitted by colleges, must indicate that the GPA was calculated using high school grades. The high school GPA certification requirements must be met whether or not a postsecondary institution certifying the high school GPA accepts the high school units for admission purposes.

**Definition of “Nontransferable Units” and “Courses Not Counted-”** “Nontransferable units” and “courses not counted in the computation for admission to a California public institution of higher education that grants a baccalaureate degree” are defined for postsecondary institutions as follows:

#### **Baccalaureate Degree Granting Institutions-**

For purposes of computing a college grade point average by a postsecondary institution that grants baccalaureate degrees: “nontransferable units” and “courses not counted in the computation for admission to a California public institution of higher education that grants a baccalaureate degree” are those courses which do not earn credit for a baccalaureate degree from the reporting institution.

#### **Associate Degree Granting Institutions-**

For purposes of computing a college grade point average by a postsecondary institution that grants associate degrees: “nontransferable units” and “courses not counted in the computation for admission to a California public institution of higher education that grants a

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baccalaureate degree” are those courses which do not earn credit for an associate degree at the reporting institution.

### ***Institutions That Grant Neither Baccalaureate Nor Associate Degrees-***

For purposes of computing a college grade point average by a postsecondary institution that does not grant either a baccalaureate or an associate degree: “nontransferable units” are those units which are not used in satisfying requirements for earning a baccalaureate degree from a California public institution of higher education that grants such a degree. “Courses not counted in the computation for admission to a California public institution of higher education that grants a baccalaureate degree” are any courses for which the earned grade is not used in the computation of a GPA in determining admission eligibility, whether or not units earned for the course are transferable to such an institution. In all instances, a GPA can be calculated from units earned at the school.

### **California Community College Grade Point Averages**

For purposes of computing a community college grade point average: “nontransferable units” and “courses not counted in the computation for admission to a California public institution of higher education that grants a baccalaureate degree” means all courses except “Associate Degree Credit Courses” as defined by Title 5, Chapter 6, Article 1, §55002(a) of the California Code of Regulations.

### **Reestablished Grade Point Averages**

Applicants who cannot meet the high school GPA requirements for any reason, or who have not yet completed the required 24 units to use a college or community college GPA, may be able to submit a community college reestablished GPA. A reestablished GPA:

- ✓ is calculated on at least 16 units, but less than 24 units, of eligible coursework earned at a California Community College that meets the community college GPA requirements in this chapter
- ✓ may only be calculated and submitted by a California Community College
- ✓ may only include units actually earned at a California Community College
- ✓ will be used only for competitive Cal Grant B consideration

### **College Grade Point Averages**

A college GPA must be calculated on a 4.00 scale using all college coursework completed, except for nontransferable units and courses not counted in the computation for admission to a California public institution of higher education that grants a baccalaureate degree. “All college work completed” includes all coursework for which grades are known to the reporting official and accepted for credit at the school reporting the GPA, regardless of the grade received.

A college GPA may only be computed for students who have earned or received a minimum of 24 college semester units, or the equivalent, regardless of the grade received. 24 semester units is equivalent to 36 quarter units and 900 clock hours.

## **4.4 Submission of Grade Point Averages**

Each year the Commission issues guidance through Grant Operations Memos regarding GPA submissions. The Commission usually begins accepting verified GPAs for the March 2 deadline at the beginning of November prior to the deadline (e.g., GPAs for the March 2, 2005, deadline can be submitted as early as November 1, 2004). Any GPA received for the March 2 deadline for a student that does not receive a Cal Grant award will also be

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considered for the September 2 competition. Schools may submit GPAs for the September 2 deadline beginning in mid-May.

The most efficient way to submit GPAs is through the Commission's GPA Collection System via WebGrants. The WebGrants' GPA function provides immediate feedback on the number of GPAs that have been accepted, it also identifies any errors in the school's upload file. Through the online GPA function, GPAs are certified electronically, thus eliminating the need to fax or mail a GPA Verification Form.

For access to WebGrants or the GPA functions, contact your campus system administrator. Verified GPAs may also be submitted on individual GPA Verification Forms. Submissions through e-mail are not allowed due to privacy and security issues.

### **What happens when the deadline falls on a Sunday or holiday?**

The statutory Cal Grant filing deadlines are March 2 and September 2 of the award year. When either deadline day falls on a Sunday or holiday, GPAs and FAFSAs postmarked or filed electronically on the next business day are legally acceptable.

### **School Certification of Grade Point Averages**

For every grade point average reported, the Commission requires a certification of the accuracy of the data. The certification is a statement that, to the best knowledge of the school official filing the report and under penalty of perjury, the grade point average is accurately reported. The certification shall include a statement that it is subject to review by the Commission.

### **Timing of Grade Point Average Submissions**

For high schools, the Commission recommends that GPA certifications be completed as early in the year as possible since the calculation is based on coursework that was completed in the previous academic year. Since college GPAs include all completed work, the Commission recommends that colleges choose one date to perform GPA extracts in order to provide consistent data for their students.

Any GPA received for the March 2 award selections that does not lead to an award offer is automatically included in the September 2 award selection. However, if additional terms have been completed, it is recommended that schools resubmit GPA files using the most up-to-date GPA data.

### **Late Institutional GPA Submissions**

The Commission may accept, on a case-by-case basis, the submission of GPAs from institutions after the established deadline if, in the opinion of the Executive Director, circumstances beyond the control of the applicant delayed or prevented the timely submission of the GPAs by the reporting institutions by the established deadline. In such cases, any request to the Executive Director to accept GPAs after the established deadline shall be received by the Commission no later than twenty (20) days after the established deadline and the computed GPAs shall be included with the request.

The Commission will notify applicants who submit an incomplete application prior to the deadline and allow a grace period of ten (10) days for the applicant to file a corrected or completed GPA. A corrected or completed submission postmarked within the 10-day period shall be treated as received by the deadline.



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### Multiple Grade Point Averages

Due to the exceptional nature of the reestablished GPA, some Cal Grant applicants may legitimately be in a situation where both a high school and reestablished GPA or college GPA could be submitted. This would occur for students who are still in the Entitlement two-year application “window,” yet who have already earned enough college units to have a reestablished GPA or college GPA submitted.

Community colleges should be aware that in order to act in the best interests of a Cal Grant applicant it would be preferable, if both a high school GPA and a reestablished GPA could be submitted for the student, that the reestablished GPA should *not* be submitted if:

- ▶ the student is within the two year “window” for Entitlement consideration, has a high school GPA high enough for Entitlement purposes and meets the other Entitlement selection criteria
- ▶ the reestablished GPA is below 2.00 which therefore would disqualify the applicant from Cal Grant B, *or*
- ▶ the student’s course of study length is less than one year and would therefore disqualify the applicant from Cal Grant B consideration

### 4.5 Submitting Test Scores

Test scores can be submitted in lieu of a GPA in any of the following circumstances:

- ▶ the applicant does not have a GPA
- ▶ the applicant’s GPA was earned at a high school that does not meet the secondary school GPA submission requirements
- ▶ the applicant’s GPA was earned at a foreign school or the foreign school does not meet the institutional GPA submission requirements
- ▶ the applicant’s GPA is more than 5 years old as of the March 2 or September 2 filing date (optional)

If test scores will be submitted in lieu of a verified GPA, students must take the test in sufficient time to meet the appropriate postmark deadline required for program submission. When submitting test scores, students should attach a properly completed GPA Verification Form to the test results (excluding the GPA certification). This will ensure that students are fully considered in all award selection categories.

To submit SAT, ACT or GED test results, applicants should complete the *Student Aid Commission Grade Point Average Verification Form* (except for the GPA certification) and then attach a copy of their test scores to the form.

### 4.6 Completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA, is available online at [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov) and on paper, in both English and Spanish. In addition to income—taxable and nontaxable—the FAFSA takes into consideration the current net value of savings, stocks, mutual funds, college savings plans, real estate investments and trusts when calculating a student’s expected family contribution.

The information provided on the FAFSA is used to determine a student’s eligibility for a Cal Grant, as well as other Federal and State aid. Specifically, income and asset information, Expected Family Contribution (EFC), dependency status, and school choice are factors in the Cal Grant selection process. In addition, responses to the Parent’s Education Level and Orphan/Ward of the Court questions are included as part of the Cal Grant Competitive scoring. More information regarding the selection process is discussed in Chapter 5.

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Only one FAFSA needs to be submitted for each school year, and photocopies or faxes of the form are not accepted.

Each year the Commission produces a variety of information designed to assist students and parents with the completion of the FAFSA.

Students and financial aid administrators should be aware that the awarding of a Cal Grant might be delayed or forfeited if FAFSA applications or GPA verification forms are completed incorrectly or if required information is not provided. Students who become aware of an error or omission on their FAFSA should send corrections directly to the processor by the application cycle deadline. The use of a PIN code to submit corrections online can speed this process considerably.



### Timely Filing

Applicants must complete a FAFSA, either online or paper, and submit it between January 1 and March 2 in order to be considered for a Cal Grant A, B or C during the March 2<sup>nd</sup> Entitlement and Competitive Cycles. There is also a second round of Cal Grant competitive awards (C2) with a September 2 deadline for students attending a California Community College. Applicants must also have their GPA certified by a school and submitted by the deadline. March 2 is the absolute postmark deadline to file for any new Cal Grant award. Students are encouraged to obtain a US Postal Service Certificate of Mailing as proof of filing by the deadline date. Any FAFSA dated or mailed prior to January 1 will be returned to the applicant.



### FAFSA on the Web

The easiest and fastest way to apply for federal and state student aid is by using *FAFSA on the Web* at [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov). The site is available in both English and Spanish. Students can apply 24 hours a day, seven days a week starting January 1.

*FAFSA on the Web* uses skip logic, so students are asked only those questions that apply to them. Built-in prompts and on-the-spot corrections mean significantly fewer errors. There is also online help for each question. *FAFSA on the Web* has a feature that lets students exchange live messages with a customer service representative. The FAFSA can be saved for up to 45 days after each time the application is opened, so it does not need to be completed in one sitting. In addition, the FAFSA will be transmitted to the federal processor within seconds, and students could receive their SAR within 72 hours, if they provide their email address. To learn more, go to [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov) or call 800.4FED.AID.

## 4.7 Cal Grant C Supplement

Each year after the March 2 competitive cycle has been completed, the Commission reviews applicants who were not awarded to determine potential eligibility for Cal Grant C. The Commission mails a Cal Grant C Supplement to these applicants. The supplement requires:

- ✓ Information about the student's educational plans
- ✓ Information about the student's education and work experience, **and**
- ✓ A recommendation from a professional person who knows the student and can comments about the student's interest and/or achievement in the occupational or technical area for which they plan to pursue

At the same time the supplements are mailed, the student is placed on a list that will be made available via WebGrants to the first eligible school listed on the student's FAFSA. Schools are encouraged to contact these applicants to help them understand the importance of completing and returning the supplement to the Commission.

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The supplemental application must be returned to the Commission for the student to compete for a Cal Grant C award. The deadline is May 15.

### **4.8 Enrollment Disk for September Deadline – Community Colleges**

To receive consideration for a September 2 Community College Cal Grant A or B, the student must submit a FAFSA and GPA Verification using the same processes as for the March 2 deadline. In addition, the student must be enrolled at a California Community College.

#### ***Only Confirmed Community College Students-***

The major difference between the September 2 and March 2 competitive selection pools is the requirement that only confirmed community college students can participate in the September 2 award selection. The Commission requires that community colleges submit attendance data to allow the selection of only those students actually in attendance at a community college. Each year, a Commission Operations Memo will provide the information that community colleges will use to release attendance data, including the attendance data submission deadline. That deadline will be approximately September 9 each year.

***Data for All Students-*** When preparing the attendance census, data for ***all*** students in attendance should be submitted. Even though half-time attendance is required for Cal Grant payment eligibility, no filtering based on the number of units a student is enrolled in should be done when preparing attendance data.

***Show Each CCC Separately-*** In some cases, a community college district may choose to report fall enrollment information for all colleges in the district. If the district does plan to report enrollment data from multiple colleges, separate files should be created.